



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1899-08-31

Letter from S. Hall Young to John Muir, 1899 Aug 31.

S. Hall Young

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St. Michael, Alaska.

Aug. 31st, 1899.

My Dear Friend Miss;

I have just arrived on the coast after an eventful & busy summer in the valley of the great Yukon. I was delayed a month in all at Skagway, more than a week after I saw you. Then I went over to Bennett, bought a Klondike boat & Mr. Koonce & I navigated it with our nearly three tons of goods down to Rampart. It was the first week in July before we arrived at our first camping place, where we were to remain any time, Eagle, just across the line in Alaska. I went at once into the woods to try to get you the cone blossoms you wished. But it was evidently far beyond the time. I chopped down a number of trees, but the cones were hardened, the blossoms gone. I am very sorry - will try to do better next summer. I have found only three species of evergreen trees in the Yukon valley. You can best name them - two species of spruce & a fir.

But I saw some wonderful country. I took one eighty mile walk across the mountains, ascending America Creek from Eagle 18 miles, then across the mountain ridges to Bonnet Creek which empties into Forty Mile, camped in the basin of great ragged-edged mountains, the haunt of mountain sheep, lived three days on grayling, then across the ridges & rugged mountain slopes

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again down Mission Cr. to Eagle. The mountains are the most beautiful treeless & snowless mountains I have ever seen. At one camp, within a radius of a few acres we picked 63 distinct varieties of flowers. I collected over 30 species of butterflies. The mountains of S.E. Alaska are not "in it" with these in flowers & insects. And such pastures! The herds of the U.S. might graze there.

I hope you will take a trip across these mountains yet botanizing & mountaineering. Leave you come to me at Cape Nome the first of July next, ascending the Yukon with me to Rampart where I am ~~then~~ to attend a meeting of the Presbytery of Yukon the fourth Thurs. of July; thence I contemplate going on up to Eagle 600 miles further, then take a pack train from Eagle across these mountains to headwaters of Copper R. & down it to Valdez, where I think of founding a mission! Thence it is easy to hit the coast. What do you say? Shall we have another "high & solemn revel" together? Break away from the luxury of millionaire trips to the freedom of roughing it with your old companion.

We shot the various rapids of the Yukon in our boat when they were at their highest & fiercest, but we got through safely & enjoyed it. I was touched by the graves at White Horse Rapids of the poor fellows who have been wrecked & drowned there. Afterwards, one midnight while steering alone

with Mr. Koonce sleeping, & got sentiment & evolved the within
so-called poem. It is poor, but you will read beyond the expression
to the feeling that prompted it.

I am to winter at Cape Nome, that is bound to
be next summer, the greatest mining camp of the North. It is
now the largest town in Alaska, and is only beginning. I have
sent outside for materials for church & dwelling, and hope
to organize a prosperous mission. We founded two ^{promising} ~~prosperous~~
ones this summer at Eagle & Rampart. The conditions
of life will be pretty severe at bleak Cape Nome this
~~summer~~ ^{winter}. I've been here this coast & know it. But I
hope to do some good, & that is the only comfort & happiness
after all. I am learning more & more to be independent
of physical circumstances for my enjoyment.

If you answer this immediately, addressing me
at Cape Nome, Alaska, either by str. direct from San
Francisco, or care of Rev. H. G. Hutchinson, D.D., First
Pres. Ch. Seattle, Wash., your letter will probably reach
me before the ice pack closes in. Write! Send me what
you can about the trip of the Elder. Pity a lonely, bookless
fellow - long, winter nights, - eight months without possible
communication, - mind-hunger, - soul-hunger!

Yours as always,

L. Hallberg.